

THE WINGS OF A DRAGONFLY

Jane Liddle

Kiki and Lulu traveled the western continents, sketching a cartography of the landscape's unpredictable changes that occurred at seemingly time-lapse speed. They drew, with their fine paint brushes and their precise pencils, the sand butterfly in Mexico (a tiny-winged moth that upon closer inspection was etched with a fractal-like pattern on its wings), the lava beetle in Venezuela (a roach that resembled an oversized ladybug and could not fly), the cupid orchid in Maine (a tall white flower that had blood red pistils in the shape of arrows), and the factory palm in West Virginia (a tree whose fan leaves turned a shiny ash gray during times of prolonged poor air quality around former longtime coal-burning towns). Even the unhappy landscapes of expanding desert or infertile dirt crescents possessed a soulfulness that ached the heart: camouflaged critters, small wolves with otherworld endurance, sunrises on humid days that shone like new pennies, and ancient cypresses holding court among it all.

Kiki and Lulu leaned back in their seats on the train, both of their heads flopped to the side as they gazed out the window. The train had slowed to a stroll. "It's windy," Kiki observed. Lulu nodded in agreement. Lulu said, "They're beautiful," and Kiki leaned over her twin sister to get closer to the window, and stayed leaning there, studying.

"They're asymmetrical," Lulu noted.

"What purpose does that serve?" Kiki said.

The twins were traveling on a train to Northern Canada, in early March, and it was not freezing outside. It was comfortable enough for them to wear some light gloves and unhooded parkas during the day. The train track was new, as far as train tracks went, but the train performed like an old-timer, ricketety and guessing, and as it chugged farther along, the tree bush limbs brushed up against the window glass like adoring fans palming a celebrity's limo.

Through those branches, in the negative shapes, they could see the long-stemmed dragon's wings, a newly discovered flowering plant whose sepals had the iridescence and oblong teardrop shape of a dragonfly's wings. And Lulu was right: they were not perfect.

“They should be called ‘sleeping beauties.’ Finally woken up by the sun’s kiss,” Kiki said.

“But who were the evil stepmothers who put the flowers to sleep for so long?” Lulu gestured to themselves, implying all of humanity. She put down the seat tray in front of her and started sketching. Kiki looked on without comment. She saw that Lulu got the scale of the stem wrong and just as this thought was processed, Lulu corrected the stem, lengthening it.

A fellow passenger walked down the aisle, alternating between swaying and balancing. He looked over at Kiki and Lulu and said, “My god, are you two twins?”

Kiki and Lulu looked up, smiled, and gave the slightest of nods.

“You two ladies must play some pretty good pranks on people.”

“Sure do,” Kiki said.

“She has a freckle on her chin.”

“And she has a chipped tooth.”

Kiki ran her tongue below her front tooth for the passenger to see for himself.

“That’s great. That’s really great stuff.”

Lulu continued to sketch and Kiki looked on until the passenger took the hint and went back to his seat a couple of rows behind them. The twins rolled their eyes without looking at each other. The train bumped along, reminding Kiki of her first time riding in a sled. Kiki had gripped the sides as Lulu's black hair flew into her mouth, which she couldn't close because of her laughter. At the bottom of the hill they wiped their watery eyes with their striped scarves, knitted by their mother when they traveled to Alaska as children.

They overheard the man talking to his seatmate. "What brings you on this train?"

"I collect plant samples for the Global Medicine Initiative. Their labs test the new plants to see if there are any healing properties. Or poisonous properties." Kiki and Lulu breathed softly so they could hear better.

"Have they found anything?"

"Not yet. We did find a tree seed that makes you trip for exactly 365 seconds. Called it the time tree."

"That's clever," the man said. "There's no knowing what these new species can give us."

The train picked up speed and the trees thinned. A half hour passed and the dragon's wings grew more plentiful in the landscape, which was both

frosty and green, as if all vegetation finally learned the lesson conifers knew all along. Here was what was once known as the tree line. That line had shifted.

Kiki looked out the window and thought she saw a fat bird that resembled a small dove with orange wings the color of goldfish.

“I’m glad we came up here,” Lulu said.

“It finally gives us a chance to wear our scarves again.”

And just then the orange-tuxedoed fat little dove took flight and the underside of its wings shimmered an island blue, a pair of flapping waves.

The sky blackened in the cover of clouds and a sliver moon. The train pulled into the station and the twins walked to a nearby boarding house, the passengers’ footsteps echoing one another. There were two white boarding houses made of wood. There was a corner store/post office/community center along the one-lane dirt road. They passed a man setting up a camera.

Kiki and Lulu entered the first boarding house, the one with the blue shutters instead of green, and approached the woman behind the receptionist window.

“Hi,” they said.

“Hi!” the woman responded. “Are you two twins?”

“I’m Kiki, and this is Lulu. We have a reservation for a double with a kitchenette.”

“Oh, right! The illustrators. It’s wonderful to meet you. I’m Etta. I figured you would arrive on this train. It only comes once a day, but I guess you know that. You probably know a lot more than I do. I’ve been here working this desk and the other one for eight years now, ever since these boarding houses were built by my brother, may he rest in peace. He was a modern-day explorer of sorts and came to live up here yearlong. After the first couple of years he got a little restless and needy from spending all his time in a one-room shed. So he built these houses for people to perform science in, or whatever was necessary. Guess you could say he is the town founder. Though we’re not a town. We’d need more than two permanent residents to be a town. I lost my home in Winnipeg and so my brother brought me here. We get a lot more visitors with all the new vegetation coming up. Wish my brother was able to see it all happen. He could have used some more stimulating conversation than I was able to provide. But he died last year around the same time as the appearance of the first dragon’s wings. He sure would have liked to have seen the two of you.”

“I’m so sorry for your loss,” Lulu said.

“Yeah, well.” Etta came out from behind the desk and motioned for them to follow her down the hall and up the stairs, chattering the entire way about the friendly sorts of brave men and women that stay at the houses, some of them just stopping over before traveling farther north where the track doesn’t go. Every ten feet along the wall an antique mirror hung, and Kiki and Lulu found it hard not to glance at themselves and assess the strength of their appearance and the physical changes in their faces, which had been under the thumb of harsh weather and time.

They came to a door that had “2C” painted on it in black. Etta opened the door into a charmingly rustic room that contained two twin beds, each covered with a fluffy quilt sewn from old button-down shirts of businessmen. “The closest bathroom is two doors down the hall on the left.”

“Thank you,” Kiki said.

Etta patted her short graying fro. “Let me know if you need anything. Don’t be shy.” She placed the keys on a bureau, expressed her pleasure in having them stay, and closed the door behind her.

Kiki and Lulu dropped their bags and explored the room. “I’m surprised there’s an oven.” Lulu said. She ran her fingers along it, then the small square card table and accompanying chairs.

“Fancy.”

Kiki relaxed on her bed and Lulu snuggled into her own quilt. They lay facing each other.

“I think I overheard someone on the train saying the horizon dove feasts on the dragon’s wings,” Lulu said.

“That makes sense. Their wings match the dragon’s pistils.” Kiki asked, “Do you think that photographer works for a government?”

“No. His stuff was too nice.”

The windows rattled from a gust of wind, and a low whistle blew through the walls. Lulu started to drift away to dreams and Kiki heard the beginning tremblings of what would soon be a constant snore. Kiki was left to stare at the blank ceiling and count imaginary farm life as Lulu dreamed, experiencing the unwitnessed particulars of her brain. Kiki mindlessly braided her own hair until her energy faded out of her.

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“Well, if it’s not the Audubon sisters!” Etta exclaimed as Kiki and Lulu walked into the corner store. The man who they had seen with the camera the day before was stirring cream into his coffee. He looked up at them. “Are you two twins?” he asked.

“Are your eyes broken? Of course they’re twins!” Etta said.

“I’m sorry, you must get that all the time.”

“We do,” Kiki and Lulu said.

“I’m Win.” He reached out his hand to shake each of theirs. “Are you really Audobons?”

“No, they draw nature. That’s why I said that. Documenting wild life,” Etta said.

“Is your name really Win?” Kiki asked.

“Edwin. But I go by Win. I’m a photographer.” Kiki and Lulu nodded.

Lulu said, “Kiki makes videos too.”

“I haven’t for a long time. We draw together.”

Lulu stepped away from Kiki to get some refrigerated bread on the other side of the store. Another woman was standing there next to the cooler, studying her options: potatoes, rice cakes, bean burgers, coconut milk. “Don’t touch anything,” she said to Lulu.

“I’d like to have some bread.”

“No. I mean, out there. Be careful.”

“It’s not a museum,” Win called over. “You won’t ruin anything by touching it.”

“That’s not what I mean.” The woman scratched her head. She took one last look at the cooler, then left the store.

“That’s June. She’s a scientist, but she’s not right. Harmless, of course, and actually quite sweet. I like her a lot,” Etta said.

Lulu reached into the cooler and grabbed some pumpernickel bread, then some jam from the shelf. Kiki fixed herself and Lulu tea, black with two teaspoons of syrup. Lulu walked to the back of the store where there was a door opened to a room with stone walls. The room had a wood-burning stove in a corner, and a stack of wood, a poker, and an iron shovel placed next to the stove as if displayed in a spread for a magazine.

“So where you from? What’s your story? All that.”

“We grew up in Niagara. How about you?” Kiki asked.

“Hawaii.”

“Oh. I’m sorry for your loss.”

“Yeah, well, I hadn’t been there in a long time.”

The fire in the stove snapped, followed by a resettling of the remaining logs. “We should probably start,” Lulu said to Kiki.

They packed their lunch and said their goodbyes. Their backpacks were filled with the appropriate supplies: compasses, pocket knives, bottled water,

soap, diaries, a picture of the whole family together in front of a waterfall that no longer existed, kicking up rainbows in its mist. They walked off the trail and followed some boulders that led to a small lake. The trees were about the twins' height, some resembling monkey puzzles more than firs, the needle branches all gathered at the top of trunks like show poodles. The soon-to-be forest was easy to pass through, not yet self-actualized.

Kiki and Lulu found a pleasant enough patch to sit on that was by a cluster of dragon's wings. They laid out a tablecloth and their supplies. Lulu immediately started drawing, paying particular attention to the dragonfly wings, struggling to capture their unnatural essence. Kiki waited for a horizon dove to visit, and soon one did. She noticed that the dove had a long beak, not quite as long as a hummingbirds', but a version of that idea, and the bird hung down from branches like a sleeping bat swaying in the breeze, all to feed from the flower. Lulu handed Kiki one of her drawings and Kiki added the bird to it. An art appraiser would not be able to discern that two different artists drew the illustration.

They sat for hours. Kiki stood up and stretched and Lulu did the same. They faced each other, grabbed each other's hands, and leaned back on their

heels. They resisted the temptation to spin like that, as they often did as children, until the time Lulu lost her grip and Kiki tripped over a rock and chipped her tooth. Lulu felt terrible and promised Kiki that she could have one of her baby teeth she still had saved in a music box.

The hoot of the train sounded. The night rolled over them in a northern light, science-fiction green and neon purple and a silent horizon except for a barking. Lulu snapped on a pair of plastic gloves and snipped a few dragon's wings, one of which was just budding, and put it in a wax paper bag. They gathered their supplies, shook out the tablecloth, came together to fold it in half, stepping back and flipping it, then coming together again, dancing the sheet into a geometrically perfect square.

They ran into Win on the walk back. "I have some rye back at my room. I can bring it to the store and we could play some cards."

"No thanks," said Lulu. "I feel beat."

"Maybe tomorrow," Kiki said.

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Back at the boarding house, Etta greeted them with tea and requests to see their drawings. They obliged by showing a couple, making no effort to

hide their desire for sleep. Etta was impressed with their talent, and was glad that the recording of the environment was in such capable hands.

They went to their bedroom and looked at the rest of their work. Kiki's horizon dove looked more like a pigeon adapted to the city. She wanted to capture the birds' plumpness but instead the bird just looked domestic. Lulu's dragon's wings did the plant justice in portraying its dual personality: the traditional shape of a white long-petaled iris placed on top of a psychedelic wreath of insect wings that looked synthetic, not to mention its lop-sided disposition.

Kiki went to use the bathroom. On her way back she saw June, the scientist that they had first encountered at the general store. She was with a man who must have arrived earlier that day. He had that worn time-travel look, the kind that needed to be slept off. He was much older than the others and sported a long beard patched with yellow.

The woman looked at Kiki up close and asked, "How are you feeling?"

"Fine," Kiki said.

The man with her said, "Forgive my student's intrusion. She's been up here too long."

"I haven't been your student for twenty years."

“I can tell you’re a recent arrival,” he said to Kiki.

“I arrived yesterday.”

The man leaned against the wall, getting the kind of comfortable that precedes a tale. “My first voyage was to the Antarctic. There I quickly learned people either go two ways in an isolated environment: progress into extreme neuroticism or regress into wild animal. June here progressed.” The man looked at Kiki sideways. “I tend to regress a little. So be careful of me.” If the man was the type to smoke cigarettes indoors, this was when he’d take a meaningful puff.

“I guess I never felt that on my voyages,” Kiki said.

“Oh. I’m Fred.”

“Kiki.”

“Kiki. I like it.”

“I have to get back to my room.”

“Take care, now,” Fred said.

Lulu was placing her dragon’s wings and sketchpad on the table when Kiki came in. Lulu said, “Was that Win outside? I can’t tell if he’s creepy or not.”

“No. Some guy named Fred, fresh off the rail. Also, June. They seem nice.”

Lulu looked up at Kiki and smiled. “Goodoes.” This was their word for good people who were weirdoes.

“Yeah. Serious goodoes.”

“You’re my favorite goodo.” Lulu took out the budding dragon’s wing from the wax bag and set it on the table. She fingered the petals that were soft like silk. She touched the sepal, which had a texture like the fabric of a seat belt. Kiki watched over her, reached out to touch the petals, too.

“Oh, no,” Lulu said. The sepal left a green residue on her thumb and forefinger, like cheese dust from a Dorito.

Someone knocked on the door and Kiki yelled out for them to come in. Etta opened the door and gestured back to Fred, then to the twins. “See! I told you there were two. He didn’t believe me. He said I just met the woman in 2C, and I said which one, and he said the pretty one with the long black hair who looks like a Chinese gymnast and I said, well there’s two of those, and he said that that’s impossible, and I told him I’d prove it and I did.”

Kiki turned to Lulu. “This is Fred.”

“Oh. Hi, Fred. I’m Lulu.”

“You’re twins!”

Both Lulu and Kiki smirked and said nothing. “Sorry. Are those your drawings? I’d love to see them,” Fred said.

“We have some of a swamp cactus by Chesapeake Bay, too. There were a lot of lizards there for Kiki to draw.” Lulu, meaning to flip the pages of the sketchbook to show Fred a spiky shrub that flowered one big coral star on its top, put her fingers to her mouth to dampen them before turning the page. “Ugh!” Lulu exclaimed, then wiped her tongue with her fingers, which made the taste worse, since the flavor was coming from the dragon’s wings’ residue. “It’s all over your fingers!” Kiki said, and she grabbed Lulu’s hands and rushed her to the sink, putting them under running water. Lulu leaned in to rinse her mouth out and spit three times.

“Didn’t taste so good?”

Lulu shook her head. She went back to the notepad and flipped the pages and pointed. “Here. It feels dry even though it’s in a swamp. The needles aren’t sharp though. They bend like rubber.”

“Beautiful.” They flipped through more drawings. Etta looked on and was generous with compliments. Fred was impressed in a paternal way.

After the visit, Lulu lay down on her bed.

“Are you okay?” Kiki asked.

“I have a headache, like that dragon’s wings’ dust gave me brain freeze or something.”

“I’ll get you a cold washcloth.” Kiki grabbed a rag and soaked it in cold water. She hovered over Lulu and pressed the cloth to her forehead. “Better?”

“Yes.”

There was no sound of breeze or stirring in the night, as if a snowfall was coming. Kiki hovered over Lulu with the washcloth as images flashed in Kiki’s mind: of passing notes to Lulu with made-up words, and of secret knocks, and of a game of hide and seek when Kiki hid in a broken dryer and was surrounded by a metallic blackness, and realizing the mistake of it, that she had finally found a place where she was completely alone and it was terrible.

“Thanks,” Lulu said, and she gently pushed Kiki’s hand away and rolled over on her side, facing her half-open suitcases and chair with her nylon jacket draped over it. Kiki got into her own bed and watched the rise of Lulu’s back as a bat flew by the window.

The next morning was unusually warm. Kiki could feel the heat of the sun through the windows and before she was fully awake she mistook her surroundings for a November afternoon in Ohio, the flat fields expanding around her like calm ocean. The sun had been a duckling yellow and found her wherever she went on the treeless grounds. There had been no hiding from the sun, just as there had once been no hiding from the soot in an old steel city still in business in the previous century. But as Kiki awoke, her disorientation evaporated and she heard a door slam as Lulu left the room. Kiki sat up in surprise, then noticed that Lulu had taken her supplies with her.

Kiki rubbed baby powder through her hair and fastened it into a bun. She made four jam sandwiches, two for her and two for Lulu. She went to the corner store, where Win was pouring himself a cup of tea.

“Have you seen Lulu?” Kiki asked.

“Yup. She was just here. Grabbed some raisins and left. Where are you two setting up camp today?”

“I don’t know.” Kiki looked around, searching. “Do you know which way she went?”

“Sorry.”

Kiki walked out of the store and ran to the middle of the dirt road and stopped, looking in one direction and then the other, trying to catch where Lulu had gone. She felt as if she was in a movie frantically searching for her lost love. A panic filled her lungs. Win stood at the glass door, looking out at her. Kiki decided to go back to where they drew yesterday but soon realized that she wasn't following the correct footprints. She thought, *This is how people die*. She thought, *If only Etta's brother thought to build a wireless communications infrastructure like in the olden days*. She leaned on a squat juniper, hugging it to her, feeling like a giant child ready to rip the bush out by its roots in superhuman anger. She saw Fred a few yards ahead photographing and snipping off tiny samples of the plant life. Kiki didn't want to conduct any small chat that morning, a chore she had gotten completely unused to during the years of traveling with Lulu. Fred waved her over and she just shook her head at him and turned north. She walked for five minutes until she came upon a copse of dwarf firs and she sat down on the damp grass and took deep breaths.

A pair of horizon doves played in the branches next to her. Kiki took out her pencils and sketched the pair together, noticing that one had pink feet while the other's was more gray. She did not draw the branches that the birds perched upon. She did finger the needles though, and her hands became sticky

from the sap. She ate half a jam sandwich, little crumbs coming off the bread and sticking to her fingers. She packed up her things and found her way back to her room to wash her hands.

Lulu wasn't at the room. After a couple of hours Kiki knocked on Etta's door. "Have you seen Lulu?"

"Oh, I saw her around lunch time. She was with Win in the store. I think they were getting into some of the rye he has. It's actually not bad. You know how it's hard to find stuff that actually tastes good, something with a little sweetness or smoke. Yeah, his rye isn't bad at all. It brings back memories of campfires and sneaking around basements during the hail storms. You're probably too young to remember those."

"Okay thanks." Kiki left Etta standing there mid-ramble and ran to the store. No one was there except June. "Have you seen Lulu?" Kiki asked.

"She's with Win."

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Lulu didn't come back to their room until the next morning. Her hair was full of knots. She patiently combed them out while sitting at the edge of her bed.

"I was worried about you yesterday," Kiki said.

Lulu shrugged.

“Are you mad at me or something?”

“No. I just wanted to have some fun. That’s all.”

“Did you?”

“None of your business. I’m going to take a shower.” Lulu got up and went over to Kiki and kissed her cheek.

Later, when Kiki went back to the store, everyone was at the picnic table drinking what looked to be the last of Win’s rye. “Kiki’s here!” he exclaimed with jolly. Everyone else raised their glasses and shouted “Hey!” followed by a song of clinking. “Join us, Kiki,” Fred said. Kiki sat next to Lulu and reached for her cup, but Lulu guarded it like she was trying to prevent a classmate from cheating off her quiz. Win noticed and poured a small amount in his cup for Kiki. She sipped it, and felt the alcohol heat her toes. June got up to put another log in the stove. Fred laughed to himself, as a warm-up, then declared, “This is a really good group of people. I can tell. I’ve been in other camps where the people weren’t so good. Never had a nice thing to say in the morning. Where you had to lock things up.”

“What did you have to lock up?” Lulu interrupted.

“Well, for starters, my dad’s wallet. The wallet saved his life, one of those classic bullet-in-the-ass stories. I mean, ‘saved his life’ is an exaggeration for literary purposes. Saved his ass from a permanent scar is more like it. But the fact that it was my mom that shot the gun gave it a special significance.”

“That’s sad,” Kiki said.

“Not at all. It was then we realized that something was really wrong. Wronger than just the blues. Not that we could do much about it except watch it play out and lock her in a room when it was really bad.”

“What?”

“Not for more than an hour. It sounds worse than it was. I think. It’s hard to know how bad things are when you’re in the midst of it. At the time you just try to get through. Anyway, after she died my dad performed an amateur autopsy. He was a jack-of-all-trades type. It turned out some of her brain was eaten away. Well, not literally, but that was how it appeared. Maybe she had concussions or an infection or something. Disappearing matter. Very strange.”

“I heard that people with brain tumors gamble all their things away,” Etta said. “And they date people half their age in front of their whole family, right out in the open with no shame or remorse. Maybe she had some sort of brain cancer?”

“Maybe.”

“Can we see the wallet? Or is it back in your room?” Lulu asked.

Fred was about to answer, then stopped. He swirled his rye in his cup, took a hardy sip. “Wallet’s long gone.”

“That’s too bad,” said Lulu.

Win was having trouble sitting upright. He had been drinking for the entire afternoon. Lulu was buzzed but holding her own. She never drank much before so she was accomplishing quite the feat. Kiki felt warm but was only sipping at her drink. Win, sensing Kiki’s fading, offered to help, and he polished it off. Etta laughed and exclaimed how she had never seen Win so drunk. “You’re like a hobo,” she said. “Aren’t we all,” Win replied, and he dropped his head into his hand and smiled lecherously at Lulu. Kiki tried to make eye contact with her, to somehow receive telepathic twin communication regarding her feelings about Win, what she had done with him, what she was doing now. But when Kiki tried to read Lulu’s mind, all she picked up was a dial tone.

Eventually, when the conversation turned into a string of slurrings that backtracked upon itself in a meandering loop, Kiki went back to her room. She was too sober for the corner store. She lay on the bed, back toward Lulu’s,

facing the kitchen area and the breakfast table that had the drawings of birds perched upon ghost branches.

The next few days passed in an unfamiliar loneliness: floating animal drawings and an unscratched back. The skies were brightening and soon would shine well into the night. Kiki stumbled upon Win on one of her treks south. He was lying on his side, photographing some snow bunnies hopping along who were searching for food and finding it.

“Hey, Win.”

Win startled onto his back, dropping his camera. The bunnies scurried away.

“Jesus, Kiki, you scared me.”

“Thanks for the rye the other night.”

“I had too much.”

“I think everyone did.”

“Not you.”

“Lulu had enough for both. I could feel it.”

“Really?”

“No.” Kiki toed a flat pebble. “How is she? I haven’t seen her.”

“She’s been staying in a different room in your building. I figured she told you.”

“She hasn’t talked to me at all.”

“Well, if it makes you feel any better, she hasn’t been talking to me, either.”

“Why would that make me feel better?”

“I’m sorry. I just didn’t want you to take it personally. I think she just needs to be alone.”

“I don’t understand.” The bunnies appeared again, tentatively, testing their human trespassers. “I feel like I’m missing a limb,” Kiki said to herself.

“Welcome to the human race, Kiki. The rest of us are born that way and spend all our lives trying on prosthetics.”

Win rolled back onto his side, clicking at the rabbits. Kiki turned away and began to walk when Win called her name. He took her picture as she turned around to face him.

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Kiki knocked on doors, trying to find Lulu. She knocked on 3A and a woman she had never seen before answered. “Can I help you?”

“No, I’m looking for someone. Sorry to bother you.”

“No bother. I’m Doll. I’m with the Global Medicine Initiative.”

“Hey, do you have any of those time tree seeds?” Kiki turned around and saw Lulu standing there, leaning against the wood-paneled wall.

“Are you two sisters?” Doll asked.

“I’ve been looking for you,” Kiki said.

“I don’t have any time tree seeds with me. Just some sand herb that I haven’t packaged up yet to send to the GMI,” Doll said.

“Does that do anything?”

“Yes. Temporary paralysis. But only in very high doses.”

“Lulu, I want to speak to you alone.”

“Sure, come in.”

“Nice meeting you,” Doll called after them. “We should all play cards later. And you could tell me what you’re doing here.”

Lulu opened the door to her room. “After you,” Lulu said as she gestured grandly for Kiki to enter.

Lulu’s room was much smaller than the one they had shared. She only had one window, and it faced a pine tree of unusually large size for this part of the world. There wasn’t an oven. Lulu only had moved a few of her things over: her scarf, one of her notepads, her graphic pencils. Kiki glanced at her new

drawings, all drawn in black and white in a cartoon style of twelve-year-old boys, the sepal oversized and menacing, the petals drawn comically small, the stem long and aimless.

A woodpecker tapped on the tree outside, its red head moving as fast as a spring.

“What’s up?” Lulu asked.

“I just miss you.” Kiki felt like a desperate girlfriend.

“Let me cut your hair,” Lulu said.

“Okay,” Kiki agreed. She really was desperate.

Lulu gave Kiki a straight-edged bob that took no time at all. “There. Now you look like a silent movie star.”

“Do you want me to cut yours?”

“No.”

“Want to go to the corner store?”

“No.”

“Well, what do you want to do?”

“Find some alcohol to drink. Or something similar.”

“Oh. Well, maybe after that.”

Lulu took off her sweater. “You should probably go. I’ll talk to you tomorrow.”

Kiki took one last glance around the room and noticed a wallet sitting on the end table. It had a hole near the spine. She looked back at Lulu and felt her brain fail her: feelings unidentifiable now that she couldn’t name them.

Back in her room, the windows rattled in the frames. Kiki bundled up, wrapped her scarf around her neck and over her head and went for a walk. She passed by the corner store, where she heard glasses pounding on the table and laughter. Maybe Doll had brought new alcohol with her. June got up and stood at the window and watched her walk by, waved.

Kiki hiked north, careful to keep pace against the stars, which tonight shone a glass green. She came upon a patch of dragon’s wings and put her nose to one. It smelled like moss. She pulled the scarf away from her mouth, ran her tongue along the bottom of her tooth, and ripped a dragonfly’s wing from the youngest flower she could find and shoved it into her mouth. She felt a headache consume her senses except for a whirring thumping in her ears slowing down into a single heartbeat.

Jane Liddle grew up in Newburgh, New York, and now lives in Brooklyn. Her stories have appeared in many fine publications on the Internet and a couple on paper. She is currently working on a novel and a book about daydreams. You can find her on Twitter @janeriddle or at liddlejane.tumblr.com.